

demande pas a aller a cent ans", repondait
ma tante, qui
preferait ne pas voir assigner a ses jours un
terme precis/
Masterly indeed is the whole picture of this
anile tyrant
who drops alike those acquaintances that
take her word
for the seriousness of her malady; and those
that do not
take it seriously enough and presumptuously
recommend
a little fresh air.

Similarly with Franfoise. Is there not a
suspicion of
self-parody in the indifference of this old
family-servant,
like her young master, to all that is in front
of her and
her emotion about what is out of sight, in
the world of
imagination; so that she exhibits a revolting
callousness
towards the kitchen-maid in agonies of colic,
but is found
sobbing in the library over the account of
the symptoms
in the medical dictionary she had been sent
an hour before
to fetch?—*He la! Sainte Vierge, est-il possible
que le bon
Dieu veuille faire souffrir ainsi une
malheureuse creature
humaine! He! la pauvre!'

Similarly with Proust's picture of a whole
society—the
^Faubourg Saint-Germain. How far he
distorts that world,
as he distorts the world at large, a stranger
cannot tell,
But the result is an extraordinary impression
of love-hate,
of glamour gradually giving place to
contempt. Anatole
France compared the author of *Les Plaisirs et
les Jours* to
'an ingenuous Petronius'. The young Proust
may possibly
have had some likeness to Nero's 'Arbiter of
Elegance',
rather than to the picaresque author of the
Satyricon. But

the parallel has been caught up and
overworked by kter
critics, whom one suspects of a certain
vagueness on the
subject of Petronius. It is too like comparing
Watteau to
Breughel. If we seek classical comparisons,
there seems to
me far more in common between Proust's
picture of
society and the mixture of mordant
psychology and
poetic pessimism with which Tacitus has
recorded the